



News Release



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Plan Ahead and Practice Safety While Hunting in Alabama's National Forests

(Montgomery, Alabama) November 30, 2009 --- For many hunters and outdoor enthusiasts, Alabama's national forests are special places during this time of year. These perfect backdrops that hold a lot of fond memories can also become a nightmare when safety measures are not taken seriously. Forest Service law enforcement officers are urging hunters to plan before hunting in the Bankhead, Talladega, Tuskegee, or Conecuh national forests. Understanding the hunting regulations and rules before making a trip can result in a safe hunting experience this season.

Potential dangers are always a factor when dealing with weapons and sometime unpredictable situations. "Hunters must not only think of their own safety, but consider the safety of others," said Charles Blake, supervisory patrol captain for the USDA Forest Service in Alabama. One of the most critical rules is to wear hunter orange. Alabama regulations require hunters to wear an outer garment that is above the waist with a minimum of 144 square inches of hunter orange or a full-sized hunter orange hat or cap. According to Blake, anyone hunting wildlife in the areas and times opened by state regulations has to wear hunter orange to avoid tragic accidents. Many users share the national forests during hunting season. "It is not required, but hikers and horse back-riders should wear a hunter orange vest or cap during this time. It's very important that everyone is easily seen," said Blake.

The National Forests in Alabama have almost 668,000 acres open to public hunting. The only requirement for hunting on national forest is that you must have a valid state hunting license and follow rules set forth by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the U. S. Code of Federal Regulations. Hunting in one of the five wildlife management areas in the national forests requires a hunting license, special permit and management area license. Wildlife management area licenses can be obtained from the Department of Conservation, and the Forest Service district offices carry special permits. Approximately 242,000 acres are set-aside as wildlife management areas on the Bankhead, Talladega, and Conecuh national forests. "Hunters need to check the scheduled days that are open for big and small game hunting," said Blake. All national forests except Tuskegee have wildlife management areas open to public hunting. The Tuskegee National Forest has over 11,000 acres open to public hunting during specific times. Hunters should check with the Tuskegee District or sporting goods shops for scheduled dates and rules.

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According to Blake, law enforcement officers work with state conservation officers to keep hunting season safe in Alabama. “We want to ensure the safety of the public while traveling on roads and using our recreation facilities,” said Blake. Hunters cannot hunt or discharge a firearm within 50 yards of the right-of-way of any public road or highway. The following are additional safety requirements and regulations hunters should be aware of while in the national forests:

1. Avoid hunting and discharging a firearm within 150 yards of a residence, building, campsites, developed recreation sites, occupied areas and trails.
2. Off- road vehicles (ORV) are prohibited unless on designated ORV trails.
3. Check state regulations regarding the use of dogs for deer hunting.
4. Always tell someone when and where you will be hunting.
5. Avoid hunting trips where you are alone. Be very careful and hunt in familiar places.
6. Check the weather forecast before going into the woods.
7. Protect yourself from hypothermia by dressing properly. Wear layered clothing.
8. Always wear hunter orange to be easily seen.
9. Check hunting equipment before and after each outing.
10. Be aware that the national forest boundaries are marked with red paint on trees, or yellow signs with black printing.
11. No permanent deer stands are allowed in the national forest.
12. The use of baiting or salt blocks is prohibited.
13. Be careful climbing in and out of deer stands. Falling can cause injuries. Alabama regulations now require all hunters utilizing a tree stand on wildlife management areas to wear a safety belt or harness.
14. Anyone born on or after August 1, 1977 must complete a hunter-education course before purchasing their first hunting license. Contact the Department of Conservation.
15. Obtain copies of hunting rules and regulations by contacting the Alabama Department of Conservation or visiting their website at <http://www.dcnr.state.al.us/hunting/>.
16. Copies and permits can also be available at most sporting goods departments.
17. Visit or call any USDA Forest Service office for information about maps, hunter camps, and camping permits. Supervisor’s Office in Montgomery at (334) 832-4470, Bankhead District in Double Springs - (205) 489-5111, Conecuh District in Andalusia - (334) 222-2555, Shoal Creek District in Heflin - (256) 463-2272; Talladega District in Talladega - (256) 362-2909; Oakmulgee District in Centreville - (205) 926-9765, and the Tuskegee District in Tuskegee - (334) 727-2652. www.fs.fed.us/r8/alabama